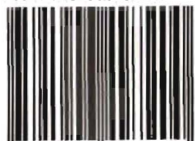




It is this dual—carnavalesque and cannibalistic—form we see reflected in every corner of the world . . . They are taken up everywhere, with greater or lesser degrees of enthusiasm, but in a totally ambiguous way, by all those 'underdeveloped' peoples who have not so far heard the good word of the universal and, hence, provide fertile ground for missionary work and forced conversion to modernity, but who, more even than being exploited or oppressed, are simply made a laughing stock and transfigured into caricatures of the Whites like those monkeys that used to be dressed up in admiral's costumes and put on show in fairs.

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Jean Baudrillard

CARNIVAL AND CANNIBAL



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VENTRILOQUOUS EVIL

THE FRENCH LIST

Jeff Roberts
4/20/200
Age 29

JEAN BAUDRILLARD

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LONDON NEW YORK CALCUTTA

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CARNIVAL AND CANNIBAL

OR

THE PLAY OF GLOBAL ANTAGONISM

WE MAY START OUT from Marx's famous saying about history occurring first as authentic event and then being repeated as farce. In this way, we may see modernity as the initial adventure of the European West, then as an immense farce repeating itself on a planetary scale, in all those latitudes to which Western religious, technical, economic and political values have

been exported. This 'carnivalization' passes through the stages of evangelization, colonization, decolonization and globalization, which themselves are historic. What is less visible is that this hegemony, this ascendancy on the part of a global order, whose models seem irresistible—and not just its technical and military models, but its cultural and ideological ones too—is accompanied by an extraordinary process of reversion, in which power is slowly undermined, devoured or 'cannibalized' by the very people it 'carnivalizes'. The prototype of this silent cannibalization—its 'primal scene', so to speak—could be said to be that solemn mass at Recife in Brazil in the sixteenth century, at which the bishops who had come expressly from Portugal to celebrate the Indians' passive conversion were devoured by them in an excessive display of evangelical love (cannibalism as extreme form of hospitality). As the

first victims of this evangelical masquerade, the Indians pushed things spontaneously to the limit and beyond: they absorbed physically those who had absorbed them spiritually.

It is this dual—carnavalesque and cannibalistic—form we see reflected in every corner of the world, with the exportation of our moral values (human rights, democracy), our principles of economic rationality, growth, performance and spectacle. They are taken up everywhere, with greater or lesser degrees of enthusiasm, but in a totally ambiguous way, by all those 'underdeveloped' peoples who have not so far heard the good word of the universal and, hence, provide fertile ground for missionary work and forced conversion to modernity, but who, more even than being exploited or oppressed, are simply made a laughing stock and transfigured into caricatures of the Whites—like those monkeys that used to

be dressed up in admiral's costumes and put on show in fairs.

Meanwhile, they ape the Whites, who regard them as apes. In one way or another, they return the derision a hundredfold to those who inflict it on them; they turn into the living derision of their masters, trapping the Whites in their grotesque doubles, as though in a distorting mirror. There is a magnificent illustration of all this in Jean Rouch's film *Les Maitres-Fous*, in which the Blacks who work in the city meet up in the forest in the evenings to ape their Western masters—employer, general and bus driver—and, in a kind of trance, to exorcize them. This is not a political act, but a sacrificial 'acting-out': a stigmatization of domination using the very marks of that domination.

But we may ask ourselves whether these Whites—the employer, the cop and the general: the 'native-born' Whites—are not already fig-

ures in a masquerade; we may ask whether they are not already caricatures of themselves, characters taking themselves for their own masks. The Whites may thus said to have carnivalized—and hence cannibalized—theirself long before exporting all this to the whole world. We have here the great parade of a culture in the grip of a profusion of resources and offering itself for its own consumption, with mass consumerism and the consumption of all possible goods merely providing the most current form of this self-devouring. And to this farce is added that other dimension Walter Benjamin spoke of, through which today's humanity succeeds in turning its worst alienation into an aesthetic, spectacular delight.

It is all a great collective spectacle, in which the West decks itself out not only in the spoils of all the other cultures—in its museums, fashions and art—but also in the spoils of its own

culture. And, indeed, art fully plays its role in this turn of events: Picasso annexes the best of a 'primitive' art and the African artist today copies Picasso as part of an international aesthetic.

If all the peoples decked out in the signs of whiteness and with all the exotic technologies are at the same time the living parody of these things, a deriding of them, this is because these things are quite simply laughable, but *we* can no longer see it. It is when they extend to the global level that universal values are revealed as a swindle. If there was an original historical and Western—event of modernity, we have exhausted all its consequences and it has taken a fatal, farcical turn for us ourselves. But the logic of modernity demanded that we impose it on the entire world, demanded that the *fatum* of the Whites should be that of the race of Cain, and that no one should escape this

homogenization, this mystification of the species.

When the Blacks attempt to whiten themselves, they are merely the distorted mirror of the negritification of the Whites, self-mystified from the outset by their own mastery. So the whole decor of modern multiracial civilization is merely a *trompe l'oeil* universe in which all particularities of race, sex and culture can be said to have been falsified to the point of being parodies of themselves.

To such a degree that it is the entire species which, through colonization and decolonization, parodies itself and destroys itself in a gigantic *dispositif* of simulation and mimetic violence, in which indigenous cultures are worn as threadbare as Western culture. For Western culture does not, in any sense, triumph: it long ago lost its soul in the effort (Hélé Béji). It has carnivalized itself, super-

adding to this the absurdity of setting up, at enormous expense, the global museum of the cheap finery of all cultures.

Perhaps we should go back to Borges's profound parable, 'Fauna of Mirrors', in which the defeated, consigned to the other side of the mirror, are reduced to resemblance, to being merely the reflected image of their conquerors. However, says Borges, the defeated gradually begin to resemble their conquerors less and less and will, one day, pass back through the mirror and put an end to the Empire's hegemony . . . If we consider what is really happening in this planetary confrontation, we see that the subjugated peoples, from the depths of their slavery, far from resembling their masters less and less and taking their liberatory revenge, have begun to resemble them more and more, have begun to mimic their model grotesquely, piling on thick the marks of their servitude—which is the

other way of taking one's revenge—a fatal strategy which we cannot term 'victorious' since it is lethal for both.

It is the whole of whiteness that buries blackness beneath the features of Carnival. And it is the whole of blackness that absorbs whiteness beneath the features of the Cannibal. Cannibalization against carnivalization—it seems as though the entire species has, by an immense anthropological sideslip, strayed off into this masquerade.

This is the paradox of universal values: all the social movements in Black society, this whole caricature of power and countervailing power, all these legacies of a Western bourgeoisie which might almost be said, in its 'historical' coherence, to amount to an original event. Ultimately, modern Western culture should never have stepped outside its own order where it constituted a kind of singular-

ity. But that was not an option; it could not escape this violent extrapolation because it already bore its own denial—and, at the same time, its own universal assertion—within itself. We are now seeing the backwash of this immense development in the form of an accelerated decomposition of the universal. And globalization is merely the theatre of this decomposition—of this farce consecutive upon history.

FARCES OF THE SCHWARZENEGGER TYPE may serve as an illustration of any sort of power-structure, even of the way politics works. We may analyse this as a caricature of democracy, as a grotesque parody of it, which, after it was unmasked, would leave us with the hope of a rational way of exercising power. But if we entertain the hypothesis that government can be sustained only by this grotesque simulation and that it is not, in any sense, the representation

of society but, rather, a kind of challenge to it, then Bush is the equivalent of Schwarzenegger. More than this, the two fulfil their roles perfectly and are 'the right men in the right place'. Not because a country or a people could be said to have the leaders it deserves, as the saying goes, but because they are emanations of global power *as it is*. The current political structure of the United States corresponds literally to its domination at the world level: Bush leads the United States in the same way that the US exerts its hegemony over the rest of the planet. There is, then, no reason to devise an alternative (one might even argue that the domination of a global power reflects the absolute precedence of the human species over all the others).

This is the whole paradox of power. We have to rid ourselves once and for all of the—very '68-ish—illusion of installing imagination

or intelligence in power, though this is, ultimately, an Enlightenment notion (all the naive utopian slogans of 1968 need revising, not just 'The imagination in power!' but also 'Take your desires for reality!' and 'Enjoy unconstrainedly!' We need to look again at all these things that have been realized or hyperrealized 'unconstrainedly' by the mere development of the system).

It all depends what idea you have of power. If you assume that intelligence should be in power, then the persistence, if not indeed permanence, of stupidity in power is inexplicable (and yet the rare historical examples of intelligence in power show that it most often veers off very quickly down the paths of stupidity). This would be the proof, then, that, in some way, stupidity is one of the attributes of power, virtually a perk of office. Perhaps this goes back to the ancestral function of having

to assume the accursed share of the social—including stupidity—which would take us back to the 'power figures' of primitive societies and explain why the most limited, unimaginative individuals stay in power the longest.

It would perhaps also explain the general tendency of populations to delegate their sovereignty to the most innocuous, oligocephalic of their fellow citizens. It is a kind of evil genius that induces people to choose someone more stupid than themselves, both as a precaution against a responsibility you are always wary of whenever it is foisted on you from above, and out of secret jubilation at watching the spectacle of stupidity and corruption afforded by those in power. Contrary to the democratic illusions of the Enlightenment, it is only by a superhuman effort that we can resolve to choose the best people; this is why, particularly in a period of turbulence, citizens

will turn in their millions to the person who doesn't ask them to think. It is a kind of silent conspiracy, analogous in the political sphere to the conspiracy we find in the field of contemporary art. This is how, from a rather different angle, Bush fulfils all the roles. On the one hand, Bin Laden declares that he needs Mr Bush's stupidity, hence that he wants him to be re-elected. On the other, a majority of Americans desire the presence in the White House of someone whose stupidity and banality underwrite their own conformism. The more stupid he is, the less personally idiotic they will feel.

In this 'stupid', hereditary function, power is a virtual configuration that absorbs any element and metabolizes it to its advantage. It may be formed of countless intelligent particles, but that will change nothing of its opaque structure: it is like a body that changes its cells but continues to be the same. In this way, every

molecule of the American nation will soon come from somewhere else—as if by blood transfusion. America will have become Black, Indian, Hispanic or Puerto Rican, without ceasing to be America. And it will be even more mythically American for no longer being 'authentically' so. And the more fundamentalist for no longer having any foundation (if, indeed, it ever had, since even the Founding Fathers were from elsewhere). And it will be all the more integrist for having become, in actuality, multiracial and multicultural. And all the more imperialist for being led by the descendants of the slaves. This is how it is. It is a paradox, but a paradox that gives the lie to the 'Power to the imagination' argument.

It is power itself that has to be abolished—and not just in the refusal *to be dominated*, which is the essence of all traditional struggles, but equally and as violently in the

refusal *to dominate*. For domination implies both these things, and if there were the same violence or energy in the refusal to dominate, we would long ago have stopped dreaming of revolution. And this tells us why intelligence cannot—and never will be able to—be in power: because it consists precisely in this twofold refusal. 'If I knew that there are still on this earth some men *without any power* I would say that all is not lost' (Elias Canetti).

WITH THE ELECTION OF ARNOLD SCHWARZENEGGER to the office of Governor of California, we are in total farce, where politics is entirely a matter of idols and fans. This is a huge step towards the demise of the representative system. And it is the inevitable outcome of current politics—everywhere those who live by spectacle will die by it—and that goes as much for 'citizens' as for politicians. It

is the immanent justice of the media. You want power through the image? Then you will die by the image-playback. The carnival of the image is also self-cannibalization by the image.

Having said this, we should not be too quick to conclude that the election of Schwarzenegger spells the decline of American political life. Behind this farce is a far-reaching political strategy, though certainly not a deliberate one (that would presuppose too high a level of intelligence), which paradoxically runs counter to our critical analyses and eternal democratic illusions. America, by electing Schwarzenegger (or by the rigged election of Bush in 2000) in this mind-boggling parody of all systems of representation, is taking its revenge, in its own way, for the symbolic contempt in which it is held. In this way it demonstrates its imaginary power; for, even more than in finance or weaponry, no other country

can rival America in this headlong dash into political farce, in this nihilistic enterprise of the liquidation of values and all-out simulation, and it will remain ahead in this particular game for many years to come: in this extreme—empirical and technical—form of mockery and profanation of values, this radical obscenity and total impiety on the part of what is, otherwise, a 'religious' people. This is the secret of its global hegemony. This is what holds everyone spellbound; this is what we enjoy even as we reject and mock the phenomenal vulgarity and a (political, televisual) universe reduced to a zero degree of culture. I say this without irony and with admiration: this is how—by radical simulation—America dominates the rest of the world, which regards it as a model; and how, at the same time, it takes its revenge on the rest of the world, which is infinitely superior to it in symbolic terms. Amer-

ica's challenge is that of a desperate simulation, of a masquerade it imposes on the rest of the world, even in its desperate simulacrum of military power. A carnivalization of power. And that challenge is one the rest of the world cannot meet: we have neither finality nor counter-finality to set against it.

With this in mind, we have to look again at the successive phases of this global masquerade of power. First, it is the West more generally that foists its political and economic models and its principle of technical rationality on the whole world in the name of universality. But this isn't the acme of the brainwashing and domination. Beyond economics and politics, global power asserts itself today through the grip exerted by simulation, an operational simulation of all values and cultures. That power is no longer exerted by the exporting of technologies, values and ideologies, but by the universal

extrapolation of a parody of those values (democracy is being universalized in a caricatured, derisory form; the 'underdeveloped' nations are geared to *the simulacrum* of development and growth, and peoples whose cultures are being wiped out set their compass by fake, Disneyfied reconstructions of those cultures—all of them spellbound by a universal model. And, though America assumes it will reap the benefits of that model, it is, at the same time, its first victim).

IT IS THEIR LIVES AND DEATHS that the terrorists are laying on the line, at the highest possible cost. It is everything by which a human being retains some value in his own eyes that we (the West) are deliberately sacrificing. *Our* potlatch is one of baseness, shamelessness, obscenity, debasement and abjection. This is the whole movement of our culture—it is here that

we raise the stakes. Our truth is always to be sought in unveiling, de-sublimation, reductive analysis—it is the truth of the repressed, of exhibition, of confession, of laying bare. Nothing is true if it is not de-sacralized, objectivized, shorn of its aura, dragged on to the stage. Our potlatch is the potlatch of indifference—an in-differentiation of values, but also an indifference to ourselves. If we cannot lay our own lives on the line, this is because we are already dead. And it is this indifference and abjection that we throw out to the others as a challenge: the challenge to debase themselves in their turn, to deny their own values, to lay themselves bare, to make their confessions, to own up—in short, to respond with a nihilism equal to our own.

We are, in fact, trying to wrest all these things from them forcibly—their modesty in the prisons of Abu Ghraib, the headscarf in our schools—but this is not enough to console

us for our abjection. They have to come to it themselves; they have to sacrifice themselves on the altar of obscenity, transparency, pornography and global simulation. They have to lose their symbolic defences and, of their own accord, take the path of the free-market order, integral democracy and integrated spectacle.

The whole stakes of the global confrontation consist in this: in this provocation to the frenzied exchange of all differences, in this challenge that they equal us in deculturation, in debasing values, in subscribing to the most disenchanting models.

The machinations over oil merely mask a much more serious destructuring. Global power is the power of the simulacrum, of a universal carnivalization, which the West imposes at the cost of its own humiliation, its own symbolic mutilation. Challenge against challenge. Potlatch against potlatch?

Are the stakes of indifference and dishonour equal to those of death? Is there an end to this confrontation and what may the victory of the one or the other ultimately lead to?

ON THIS POINT, I am entirely in agreement with Boris Groys's 'double potlatch' hypothesis (See 'Les corps d'Abou Ghraïb'): the Western potlatch of nullity, self-debasement, shame and mortification set against the potlatch of death. But is this a genuine symbolic response to the terrorists' challenge? Let us leave aside war here, or the battle 'against Evil', which are, for their part, the admission of a total incapability to respond symbolically to the challenge of death. We are speaking of the deliberate sacrifice by the West of all its values, of everything by which a human being or a culture has some value in its own eyes. *Il sacrificio della dignità fondamentale, dell' pudore, dell' honore . . . a self-*

annihilation, a disenchantment and prostitution of self thrown in the Other's face as a weapon of mass deterrence—a vertiginous seduction by emptiness, a challenge to the Other (to Islam, but also to the rest of the world) to prostitute itself in turn, to unveil itself, to cough up all its secrets and lose all sovereignty—and hence, the sovereignty, *par excellence*, of death.

Have we an immense *auto-da-fé* here—in which case we can view it as a symbolic response, by mutual challenge. Potlatch against potlatch—does the one balance out the other? We may take the view that the one is a potlatch by excess (that of death), the other a potlatch by lack (that of self-derision and shame). In that case, the two do not exactly meet head on and we should speak, rather, of asymmetric potlatch. Or should we rather take the view (thereby acknowledging that Groys is right in a way) that ultimately no form—not even that

of the challenge of death or of extreme sacrifice—can be regarded as superior, and hence the terrorist challenge cannot be seen as superior to the opposite, Western challenge? Yet it seems that the West is not able to make an equal response, as is the rule in potlatch; it is not able to respond to death with death or, most importantly, to raise the stakes and make a response that goes beyond it—for what is there beyond death? We may, however, take the view that, at the highest level, at the height of the confrontation, a more general and even more radical form of reversibility is in play, which means that no form—not even the highest—escapes reversion or the victorious substitution of another form, as in the game of 'scissors, paper, stone'. Even the most extreme, most sublime thing one can conceive of will be taken over and surpassed by some other form—perhaps even by its opposite or carica-

ture. This is how it is. This is the game. Matters are never definitively settled.

Having said this, to contemplate the idea that a global power, which is, after all, a form of self-abasement and universal abasement, may nevertheless constitute a power of defiance, a power of response to the challenge from the other world—that is to say, ultimately, a symbolic power—means for me a drastic revision, a casting into the balance of what I have always thought (which has always had the revolt and final victory of Borges's 'Fauna of Mirrors' as its horizon). But perhaps we have to resign ourselves to the idea that even reversibility, as a weapon of mass seduction, is not the absolute weapon; and that it is confronted with something irreversible—in what we may just discern today as a worse kind of ultimate prospect.

2004

Note

- 1 Boris Groys, 'Les corps d'Abou Ghraib', *Cahiers de l'Herne* (Jean Baudrillard), 84 (2004): 268–74.

VENTRILOQUOUS EVIL¹

'And what then would you do . . . if you were
the ruler of the world for one day?'

'I suppose I would have no choice
but to abolish reality!'

'I would like to know
how you would set about it!'

Robert Musil

THERE IS AN ORIGINAL FORM of repetition, the form that expresses the fact that you only ever have one idea in your life (assuming you have the good fortune to have *one*), but that analysing it allows you to nuance it or have it emerge or show through in spiral or anamorphic form.

In fragment form, thought *alludes* constantly to a single idea—playing, from varied, unusual angles, on perspective and illusion. There is a whole art in unfurling a body of thought in such a way that one ends up passing it by without seeing it. This is the opposite of discourse, which lays out its findings and arguments and sentences itself to house arrest within the precincts of its own conclusions.

Similarly, most current events merely play a walk-on part. Just a few of them unfold not as they are presented to us—in terms of a causal, historical succession—but by a form of

anamorphosis, in which they are linked more strangely, without their meaning or idea really appearing. They change into each other, as it were, and some of them (often the tiniest) gain in intensity as this analogical relation to thought develops.

This is more or less the object of analysis: *to get closer to the analogical heart of the event and thought.*

And I think for us today that that heart is the sphere of hegemony, which is too easily confused—under the heading of power—with domination.

Domination is defined by what it is opposed to, by relations of force and internal contradictions. It is defined by a negativity, and, in order to exist, the master has as much need of the slave as the slave has of the master. Hegemony, by contrast, no longer has need

of the opposite term; it does not need its contrary in order to exist—that contrary for which, unlike domination, it has no definition (which is why the concept of ‘liberation’ has no meaning for it: it has meaning only in the field of systems of domination).

Moreover, we cannot speak of ‘hegemonizers’ and ‘hegemonized’ in the way we speak of the dominators and the dominated. This is what lends hegemony its potency and, in this sense, we may see it as the highest stage of power, though this is no longer exactly a political power but a kind of hyper power freed from any legitimacy or representation, freed even from domination and power. A form of supremacy.

We can no longer conceive of any opposite or antagonistic pole to this sphere in which the same technological linkages are formed the world over—the same networks of integration

and circulation, the same type of exchange and generalized interface. Indeed, we have little by little lost even the power to imagine what might be set against it—an inertia that is starkly illustrated by the current political situation. If, then, there are forces antagonistic to this global power—and we can be in no doubt that they exist (but where *are* they?)—they are no longer, properly speaking, forces of opposition; they no longer confront it in a conflictual, contradictory relation; they have become paradoxical, paratatic, parallel and asymmetrical. We have to come to terms with the idea that negativity, as we have known it—that mainspring of history and human action—is disappearing, and that the global antagonism works itself out now in quite a different way, far from the good old oppositions and the good old relations of force. We have moved on from critical analysis and the things that were at issue in the Enlightenment,

not to a democratic reconciliation and a benign global order, as they would like to have us believe, but to a much more radical antagonism, and one which no longer leaves room for any kind of strategy—a fact that demoralizes the strategic planners.

Domination still had its strategy, which was to incorporate the negative as conflicts unfolded and in accordance with a dialectical perspective opened up by its adversaries themselves. By contrast, the hegemonic form tends quite simply to liquidate its opponents, regarding them as worthless, eccentric and residual. A style not of oppression and alienation, but of excommunication of everything that doesn't fall within this sphere of integral performance and exchange. A style of foreclosure of a delinquent minority—exactly parallel to the theological position which contends that Evil does not exist.

Seen from this standpoint, Evil is never the reverse side or enemy of Good (in which case, it would be enough simply to make it function as a negative mirror, with a final redemption resulting). It simply no longer exists! It is merely illusion and phantasmagoria. At this point of total ascendancy that is the current or potential situation of global omnipotence, *Good no longer needs Evil in order to exist*. Positivity no longer takes any account whatever of negativity, either as diabolical force or as dialectical antithesis.

This is how, with the advance of what Günther Anders would call the *obsolescence* of domination, critical thought and the famous 'work of the negative'—indeed, all stable forms of opposition—have found themselves subsumed into the workings of the system, and we are desperately in search of an antagonistic pole or anything whatever that may thwart and disrupt the whole thing.

Might what we are seeing be the irresistible movement of history? It seems likely.

If this is the case, then the die is cast and all the violent, refractory, phantom events running through this period (from 11 September to the 'No' in the French referendum and the eruptions of sacrificial violence in the Paris suburbs) are merely archaic, residual exceptions, forms of populist delinquency or of a fanaticism blind to this technocratic redemption. For others who have lost all their illusions, the die is also cast: it is the final option and nothing can be done against it. We are its hostages—victims and accomplices at one and the same time—immersed in the same global monopoly of the networks. A monopoly which, moreover—and this is the supreme ruse of hegemony—no one holds any longer. For no one, neither the individual, nor the state, nor any superior agency, is answerable

for any of this any longer, either for better or for worse.

As soon as Good has rid itself of any adversary, it becomes exponential and has no other end than the saturation of the world and the world's 'on-line' extension.

And yet everything is still not for the best in this best of all worlds, for, as this performance goes global, it also becomes increasingly unintelligible. And one inevitably has to wonder whether that unintelligibility may not, precisely, betray the emergence of a counter-hegemonic power—an equal, if not superior antagonistic power.

It remains for us to explore all the paths of hegemony, particularly all the processes of the liquidation of the negative—and, at the same time, with no illusions about the critical values forged in the era of domination, to

explore the paths of genuine counter-hegemony, which are perhaps also the paths of power's death throes.

THE PROCESS is, no doubt that all things hasten towards their abstraction, thereby obeying a frantic desire to escape their materiality. There is a kind of progressive break with the materiality of the terminal phase of which might be said to be that in which the Other has disappeared, and in which one can now feed only on oneself (with a relish mingled with horror and disgust) the whole of the historical process being reduced to a self-referential spiral.

Capital is the purest expression of the reality principle. It has *become reality*. It produced it, it became it and, by disappearing, it will make it disappear as a consequence. The movement by which it became reality and by which it is devouring it is one and the same.

In its advanced form, capital aims for ever-increasing abstraction and hence seeks to offload that machine for slowing down exchanges that reality might still be said to be. It therefore sacrifices it and, in the process, sacrifices itself. This is how we pass beyond capital—which played its historical role of domination and alienation to the end, but could go no further and had to give way to a much more radical system of abstraction—digital, electronic, virtual alienation, which rounds off that flight out of materiality we were speaking of—and at the end of which the world and the Human have disappeared once and for all.

Every personal dimension and all demiurgy is abolished in favour of an operational mechanics. Human beings are totally relieved of responsibility: today, even power is a source of shame and there is no one left genuinely to take it on. Humanity is no doubt the only

species to have invented a specific mode of disappearance that has nothing to do with the law of nature. Perhaps even an *art* of disappearance.

But perhaps in the end we dreamed of this irresponsibility, of this total jettisoning of freedom and will—‘We dreamed it, IBM did it!’² Nothing is more cunning or more inventive than human beings when it comes to exploring the tiniest nuances of servitude. This entire electronic, cybernetic revolution is perhaps merely a piece of animal cunning that humanity has found in order to escape itself, at the same time as escaping the monstrous responsibility to which it is now over-exposed in what has become a global context. The sexual process, the process of death, all singularities and fateful processes recede before the final solution: the technical, artificial equivalent of life and death.

However this may be, beyond this vanishing point everything loses its negative power but everything continues to exert an occult influence, as has been said of the ancient gods. Everything remains in being and seeps into our lives in infinitesimal doses, which are often more dangerous than the visible agency that dominated us. The prohibitions, controls, inequalities and differences disappear one by one, but they do so only the better to be internalized in the mental sphere . . .

Then there is the disappearance of the subject, for example, which is, to some degree, the mirror image of the disappearance of the Real. In fact, the Subject is dying out. The subject that is an agency of will, freedom and representation, the Subject of power, knowledge and history is vanishing, giving way to a diffuse, floating, insubstantial subjectivity that is an immense reverberation surface for a

disembodied, empty consciousness. As a result, everything now radiates out from an objectless subjectivity, with each monad and molecule caught in the trap of a definitive narcissism, a perpetual image-playback. This is the image of an end-of-the-world subjectivity, from which the subject as such has disappeared, a victim of that fatal twist to which, in a sense, nothing stands opposed any longer—neither object, nor Real, nor Other.

THE COMPULSION TO ACCUMULATE, to grow, to produce and to reproduce is all, in fact, the system's consecration of the proletariat as such. The proletariat is, in effect, literally the 'prolific' entity, the entity that has no other *raison d'être* than to multiply [from Latin *proles*: offspring]. We may thus say that the human species in its entirety has been proletarianized by multiplying to infinity in the name of pro-

duction (including demographic production, since the reproduction of the species has succumbed, as it were, to the unlimited industrial principle of growth; the human race has, thus, taken on collectively what was originally merely the fate of the poor; this was not the case in previous societies which offset any danger of surplus or over-production—including the over-production of human beings—by spontaneous regulatory mechanisms).

We have gone beyond this point of 'equilibrium' without it really being possible to say when the general de-regulation began or what caused it. And was there, indeed, a cause? Isn't it a pure chaotic process, an accidental logic? However this may be, once the critical threshold of proliferation is reached, everything massifies: individuals, signs and machines massify and language itself massifies; everything passes into an exponential growth, the process

of which, beyond that critical threshold, is irreversible. And though the 'historic' proletariat was, according to Marx, destined to abolish itself as class, this massive proliferation isn't in any sense destined to come to an end. That can be the outcome only of a violent disaccumulation effect, a global collapse.

The only true fundamentalism, giving rise to the only true terror, is the fundamentalism of a fluid, mobile technocracy, the technocracy of flows and networks, of an inexorable dissemination and mental diaspora: *a fundamentalism without foundations*.

All the other forms of reactionary violence, all the other kinds of integrism—the totalitarianisms, the religious and ethnic fanaticisms—all this visible, spectacular violence that culminates in terrorism is less lethal than the invisible tentacular form of violence of the inexorable world process, of 'world processing'.³

Similarly, the atomic threat is merely the metaphor of atomization, of the digital dislocation of everything into an immense computer programme in which not only bodies, but mental structures, are irradiated and vaporized.

There is no better example of this evanescent structure of a de-polarized subject replaced by a computer programme of will and action, or of this body without organs traversed by flows and extending into an objectless desire, than Musil's *Man Without Qualities*.

Today, on the other hand, responsibility's point of gravity lies not in the individual but in the relations between things. Has one not noticed that experiences have made themselves independent of man? They have gone on to the stage, into books, into the

reports of scientific institutions and expeditions, into communities based on religious or other conviction . . . There has arisen a world of qualities without a man to them, of experiences without anyone to experience them, and it almost looks as though under ideal conditions man would no longer experience anything at all privately and the comforting weight of personal responsibility would dissolve into a system of formulae for potential meanings. It is probable that the dissolution of the anthropocentric attitude (an attitude that, after so long seeing man as the centre of the universe, has been dissolving for some centuries now) has finally begun to affect the personality itself; for the belief that the most important thing

about experience is the experiencing of it, and about deeds the doing of them, is beginning to strike most people as naïve. Doubtless there are still people who experience things quite personally . . . [B]ut this kind of people now usually appears absurd to the others, although it is as yet by no means established why. And, all at once, in the midst of these reflections, Ulrich had to confess to himself, smiling, that for all this he was, after all, a 'character', even without having one.⁴

I SHOULD LIKE ANOTHER EXTRACT to stand over against this one, this time from Don De Lillo's *Cosmopolis*. Though radically different in inspiration, it is also a kind of parable. It provides a ferocious portrait of this hegemonic universe, built on indifference and

acceleration, a world beyond all quality and all value judgement:

It was shallow thinking to maintain that numbers and charts were the cold compression of unruly human energies, every sort of yearning and midnight sweat reduced to lucid units in the financial markets. In fact data itself was soulful and glowing, a dynamic aspect of the life process. This was the eloquence of alphabets and numeric systems, now fully realized in electronic form, in the zero-oneness of the world, the digital imperative that defined every breath of the planet's living billions. Here was the heave of the biosphere . . .

[...]

The Greeks have a word for it . . . '*Chrimatistikos*,' [the art of money-making]

she said. 'But we have to give the word a little leeway. Adapt it to the current situation. Because money has taken a turn. All wealth has become wealth for its own sake. There's no other kind of enormous wealth. Money has lost its narrative quality the way painting did once upon a time. Money is talking to itself'.

[...]

Never mind the speed that makes it hard to follow what passes before the eye. The speed is the point. Never mind the urgent and endless replenishment, the way data dissolves at one end of the series just as it takes shape at the other. This is the point, the thrust, the future. We are not witnessing the flow of information so much as pure spectacle, or information

made sacred, ritually unreadable. The small monitors of the office, home and car become a kind of idolatry here, where crowds might gather in astonishment . . . Does it ever stop? Does it slow down? Of course not. Why should it? Fantastic.

[. . .]

But these [protestors] are not the grave-diggers. This is the free market itself. These people are a fantasy generated by the market. They don't exist outside the market. There is nowhere they can go to be on the outside. There is no outside . . .

[. . .]

The market culture is total. It breeds these men and women. They are necessary to the system they despise.

They give it energy and definition. They are market-driven. They are traded on the markers of the world. This is why they exist, to invigorate and perpetuate the system.⁵

THIS IS THE STATE OF THINGS in which the system has snaffled all the mechanisms of simulation, parody, irony and self-derision; it has snaffled the whole of the negative and, with it, critical thought, leaving the latter only the *ghost* of the truth.

All the same, things are perhaps not settled once and for all, since the rules have changed (or perhaps there are no rules any longer) and the new situation is as follows: by denying the very existence of Evil (all the forms of radical, heterogeneous, irreconcilable otherness), by making the negative a kind of prehistoric vestige, Good has, in a way, given Evil its

freedom. In seeking to be Absolute Good, it has freed Evil from all dependency and given it back its autonomous power, which is no longer simply the power of the negative but the power to change the rules of the game. Something resurfaces here of the Manichaean heresy, which asserted the originality and singularity of Evil. And one can feel something analogous playing itself out in the depths of this integral reality. As the old forms of revolt that defied the dominant power find themselves swallowed up by the system itself, a new counter-finality is springing up from all the interstices of the system, a challenge to the supremacy of Good, infiltrating and breaking up that reality much more radically than the work of the negative did.

When the power of the negative fades, when the prohibitions, controls, inequalities and differences disappear one by one, the bet-

ter to internalize themselves in the mental sphere, it is at this point that *Evil, as undesirable alien, becomes ventriloquous*.

The Banque Nationale de Paris had a famous advertising slogan in the 1970s: 'Your money interests me!', which sums up better than any critical analysis can do, the ignominy of capital. Denunciations of that ignominy were as old as the hills, but what was new and scandalous was having these words come direct from the bankers themselves, the truth coming straight from the mouth of Evil, so to speak. The truth came straight from mouth of the dominant power itself, and that power, secure in the knowledge of its total immunity, admitted its 'crime' quite openly.

The most recent profession of faith of this same kind was uttered by Patrick Le Lay, the CEO of the French TV channel TF1. 'Let's be realistic,' he said, 'TF1's job is to help

Coca-Cola shift product . . . For an advertising message to get through, the viewer's brain has to be receptive to it. It's the aim of our programmes to make that brain receptive, that is to say, to entertain it and relax it, to prepare it between two messages. What we sell to Coca-Cola is receptive human brain time . . . Nothing is more difficult than obtaining that receptiveness.'

We have to pay tribute to this amazing declaration of principle for its outstanding professional cynicism (which it shares with many other similar declarations, such as that of the French post office: 'Money has no sex, but that shouldn't prevent it from reproducing').

But this is not the point. What struck people in the Le Lay case was the barefaced cheek of the statement, which fascinated even those who condemned it. Isn't this immoral offhand-

edness the mark of a greater freedom of expression than is shown in the eternal stereotyped language of critical protest?

And this is, in fact, the problem—that the truth has been stolen by an 'arrogant' discourse that thwarts any form of criticism by short-circuiting it. The real scandal doesn't lie so much in technocratic cynicism as in the breaking of a rule of our social and political game, which says that the corruption is on one side and the protest against it on the other. If the corrupt no longer respect this protocol, if they lay out their hands for all to see, without even doing us the courtesy of hypocrisy, then the ritual mechanism of critical condemnation is taken from us. This is capital laid bare by the capitalists themselves.

Le Lay is stealing from us the only power we have left; he is stealing condemnation! This

is where the scandal lies. Otherwise, how are we to explain all these outraged reactions to someone spilling the beans on an open secret?

Instead of condemning Evil from the standpoint of Good—the eternal moral position—he is speaking Evil from the standpoint of Evil. And immediately, all that excels in arrogance (Le Pen), cynicism (Le Lay), pornography (the Abu Ghraib pictures) and mythomania (the fabulous story of Marie L.)⁶ is, by that very token, more effective at unmasking the truth of the system than traditional critique!

If the truth hits the mark and hits home with people, this is because it comes, paradoxically, from the horizon of Evil. We always expect it to come from the side of Enlightenment and Reason—which was perhaps the case historically—but today it is from the hori-

zon of Evil that the truth emerges as an unexpected event, deriving all its force from coming from the place one least expects it.

All the discourses of Good are ravaged by ambivalence. This is particularly visible in the relationship to stupidity, which is the murkiest, but also the most direct and massive expression of this ventriloquousness of Evil. Philippe Muray has magnificently described this beatification, this grotesque pacification of the real world, this festive reduction in perpetuity of the whole of modernity to a party.⁷ Now, it is precisely here, in this extension of the domain of Farce, that Ventriloquous Evil advances on all sides, establishing the hegemony of stupidity—which is the equivalent of hegemony plain and simple.

Of all the modalities in which the proscribed negative can show through in ventrilo-

quous mode, stupidity is both the most banal and the most mysterious. Better, it becomes a source of energy—and a source of hidden truth—since, no longer expecting anything from a higher instance, we are reduced to this subterranean one, whose energy is inexhaustible, since it comes to us from the immensity of stupidity itself. We must then—and Muray clearly saw this—draw from it all its innate energy, allow it to deploy itself in all its self conceit; we must allow Evil to speak ‘through the belly’. We have to let this masquerade, this banality of Evil work at its own derision. This is ‘the intelligence of Evil’. Moreover, in the absence now of an active power of the negative, where could we get energy from today if not from a violent abreaction to this ambient stupidity?

As soon as Good rules and claims to embody the truth, it is Evil that comes through.

Let us take the No to the European referendum.⁸ It was clearly stupidity that voted No; it was statistically the most stupid (the backward, the retarded) who voted No, but that stupidity was precisely the intelligence of Evil. It was Ventriloquous Evil that replied ‘No’ to the referendum. Not the spirit of the Negative which, like the ‘Yes’, lends its assent to Political Reason. But an illogical No, resistant to Political Reason, and shot through with the exigency not to be annexed or taken hostage by any model whatever—even an ideal one (especially not an ideal one!)—the exigency not to lend itself to the dialectical stratagem: ‘Your No is a No to Europe as it is, but a Yes to Europe as it should be!’

There is no difference between the ‘free market’ Yes and the European ‘social’ No. This is why the No, which is merely a No to a particular kind of Europe, isn’t really a No—

the only No that genuinely constitutes an event is this strange, non-political, non-dialectical, elusive No, since it runs counter to enlightened self-interest. It is a No that isn't the opposite of a Yes (the No of the things that can exist without their opposites), but might be said to be closer to a silent rejection of the kind that makes Bartleby say, 'I would prefer not to!' I am not playing the game! (But without aspiring to provide a reason.)"

You have to be able to fight everything that wishes to do Good to you.

Against the Axis of Good: the parallax of Evil.

Gilmore (*The Executioner's Song*) and his refusal of a pardon.¹⁰

Bartleby and his tenacious rejection.

Those who vote No to Divine Europe.

The immigrants who burn their schools.

They are all fighting against that which wishes to do them good.

This is what Gilmore does in *The Executioner's Song* and it is what makes this mundane story of a condemned man funny and paradoxical. He fights—he is forced to fight—against his staunchest defenders (those who refuse to let him be executed in the name of the absolute principle of the right to life, a principle which does, however, show itself for what it is: the moral obligation to live at all costs, the categorical imperative to exist, that principle in whose name they hanged suicides, dead or alive, in the Middle Ages). It is against this ultimatum that Gilmore rebels—not that he is in favour of the death penalty, but he is equally opposed to the injunction that he must live, opposed to that institutional 'human right', against which he sets another—unconditional human right: the right to die. He

thereby transcends his own crime and any idea of punishment and transforms his particular case into a metaphysical duel with the forces of Good. The very people who want to save him (despite himself) come to detest him for having demanded to die. This is quite a fetching contradiction of the whole system of moral values—and the fact is that, at bottom, condemning someone to death and condemning them to life 'on principle' involves the same kind of legal violence. And it must be rejected in every case, even when—especially when—the desire is to 'do you good'.

Gilmore doesn't at all think he 'deserves' to die, nor does he think he must allow his life to be taken to expiate his crime. Having been condemned to death, he simply demands that the authorities face up to the sentence, as he is prepared to do. He thereby shows how every sentence is a double-edged sword and that it

can be returned to the sender. It is a challenge in which the price to be paid is his own death, but what is at stake is making the whole of a society lose face when that society, in its arrogance, reserves the right to grant him mercy against his own will (putting in play their own deaths, not suicidally but as a weapon of defiance, is also the terrorists' strategy). If he wins out in this duel, then, admittedly, he loses his life, but he recovers a glorious image of himself—far from the paths of pardon and repentance which he despises. It is a bit like the Student of Prague who dies when he shoots the mirror from which his image has been stolen, but re-finds himself in the fragments of the mirror in the moment of his death.¹¹

It is like the woman in the coma who was given a life-sentence of life—it is forbidden to unplug her. Gilmore wants to be unplugged. At issue here, as ever, is the gift. The gift you

reject because it is inflicted on you unilaterally—which amounts to a humiliation and a symbolic dispossession. We can see this clearly in the rage of *those* who defend existence at any price, the same rage as shown by the advocates of the *Yes* against the *No*. The extraordinary, misplaced anger of the well-wishing against those who reject their overtures. It is the anger of the people of God (of Divine Europe), of those who have universal right on their side and hence the right to exterminate the apostates. This hatred on the part of the disappointed of conquering Good and hegemonic Reason is much fiercer than the hatred felt by the dispossessed, by those who have things taken from them, who are exploited and whose material means of life are snatched away from them.

They have no other outlet than a liberatory violence, a violence of protest and

demands. Quite different is the violence of those to whom one gives, to whom one gives forcibly, or whose lives one spares. They have only symbolic revenge left to them.

Now, for want of anything better, this revenge crystallizes in the unconditional withdrawal from the social order, from the planetary order, from the conventional order, from the advantages of reason. This is why the case of Gilmore, who wants to be killed—to be unplugged—who rejects any leniency on the part of the law, which would cause him to lose face, is the reflection today of a universal situation and a universal challenge: a challenge to the ascendancy of all the networks, to that enframing by all the blessings of Reason, Technology and Science.

Must we accept this unconditional conditioning or not?

We are all reduced today to saving the little bit of singularity, the little bit of symbolic space and territory left to us, against a global machinery, a global enterprise of Doing-Good, which demands of us the sacrifice of any will and intellect (this is still the pact that was proposed by Dostoevsky's Grand Inquisitor: well-being and servitude).

And where might this 'left-field' energy come from? From that impenetrable zone there is in every individual; from that 'heart' that is resistant to the injunction of all the apparatuses, of all the machinery of rationalization.

It is all this that is in play in Gilmore's fantastic defence.

IN THE PROMETHEAN PERSPECTIVE of unlimited growth, there is not merely the desire to make everything function, to liberate every-

thing, but also the desire to make everything signify.

Everything is to be brought under the aegis of meaning (and reality). In some cases we know that knowledge will forever escape us. But in the immense majority of cases we do not even know what has disappeared and has always already eluded us.

Now, science makes a systematic effort to eradicate this secret area, this 'constellation of the mystery'¹² and to eliminate this demarcation line between the violable and the inviolable.

All that is concealed must be revealed; everything must be reducible to analysis. Hence the whole effort (particularly since the death of God, who restrained this attempt to break open the natural world) leads to an extension of the field of meaning (of knowledge, analysis, objectivity and reality).

Now, everything inclines us to think that this accumulation, this over-production, this proliferation of meaning constitutes (a little like the accumulation of greenhouse gases) a virtual threat for the species (and for the planet), since it is gradually destroying, through experimentation, that domain of the inviolable that serves us, as it were, as an ozone layer and protects us from the worst—from the lethal irradiation and obliteration of our symbolic space.

Shouldn't we then, work precisely in the opposite direction, to extend the domain of the inviolable? To restrain the production of meaning the way they are trying to restrain the production of greenhouse gases, to reinforce that constellation of the mystery and that intangible barrier that serves as a screen against the welter of information, interaction and universal exchange.

This countervailing work exists—it is the work of thought. *Not* the analytic work of an understanding of causes, of the dissection of an object-world, *not* the work of a critical, enlightened thought, but another form of understanding or intelligence, which is the intelligence of the mystery.

WHAT REMAINS ENIGMATIC is the simultaneity of determination and counter-determination. Social being is determined also *against* the social—a society is determined also *against* its own value system. Hence all the unpredictable—individual or collective—abreactions, due to this fundamental ambivalence which never disappears, since every attempt to incorporate it and reduce the 'duplicity' in fact revives it. As for the social, and the sociology that legitimates it and makes it an objective discipline (and, further along the road, socialism,

which makes it an ideal or an ideology), they disappear as such—wrecked by this unilateral pretension. An anthropological nonsense.

In a last effort to rescue this threatened species (the social), a virtual category has been invented: *sociality*, attempting to sublimate the—now obsolete—objective mechanisms of the social into a fluid structure, which has become a vibration and a nerve impulse, acting as a vector for the ‘social bond’ (though this is a pleonasm: if the social exists, it is necessarily already a binding or liaison—and as dangerous as any other).

The triumph of Good, then, is never without a rebound effect.

The response always comes, even if it has been eradicated root and branch, and the shock wave from this abolition of the negative and the counter-gift is now assuming the same

proportions as global power. This latter is paying the price for the gigantic ethnic cleansing it has begun on the negative. Having abolished the negative, it can no longer even be denied ‘dialectically’; the only threat to it is a much more violent denegation, a radical denial and disavowal—in a particularly ironic form, since it involves a kind of cannibalistic self-destruction.

It is, then, a kind of groundswell or shock-wave that wells up from the depths of anthropology and goes far beyond our mundane economic, social or political crises. And it is this that makes our contemporary scene seem so ridiculous, so convulsive and beyond the reach of any real or virtual solution. All analyses confine themselves to a superficial level, most often seeking a solution by amplifying the factors that actually militate against one.

WHAT BRINGS SHAME ON YOU TODAY absolute disgrace—is not responding to a growth imperative—or not showing signs of doing so, which amounts to the same thing.

This is how most things assume such enormous dimensions, proliferate and globalize in the total absence of any 'objective' justification. Nothing is more characteristic today than this positive incrustation of growth in the universal mentality.

Running beneath the surface of that growth, one does, however, see a strange contradictory reaction forming and subtly rising up against this unconditional objective. A kind of doubt and repentance, if not indeed anxiety at this need to exhaust all one's possibilities. Can we not divine here, above and beyond our colossal technical advance, an increasing difficulty, on the part of the species, of identifying

with itself, or quite simply an increasing difficulty of knowing what it is? This is something quite different from a critical development in respect of the state of growth; it is a disavowal of growth itself, the most often unconscious, clandestine disavowal of the entire value system our society is founded on. Once again, it isn't a matter of a conscious political, social or economic critique, but a dissidence, a refusal to play the game. A betrayal

This is where Zidane and his head butt at the last World Cup come in—a stunning act of disqualification, of sabotage, of 'terrorism'. By blighting this ritual of planetary identification, these nuptials between sport and the planet, by refusing to be the idol and mirror of globalization in such an emblematic event, he is denying the universal pact that permits the transfiguration of our sad reality by Good and allows billions of unidentified human beings

to find an identity in the void (the same sublimation operates in the sacred illusion of war). And it was, indeed, stigmatized as an act of desertion, but, as such, it also became simultaneously a cult gesture: by passing from the peak of performance to the peak of dysfunction, to the thwarting of Good in all its splendour, it suddenly pointed up the Nothingness at the heart of globalization. And all this by a simple act that is not in any sense a gesture of revolt. One might say that this act, quite apart from all its subjective aspects, came from somewhere outside himself that it was a tipping point leading to the instantaneous mockery of the entire system. Certainly the most glorious (and most elegant) 'scandal' we have been afforded for many years. It is a 'blow' by which everyone can be said to have lost the World Cup. But isn't that better than having won a victory for globalization itself?

There is here the principle of a genuine event, of those singular events that challenge globalization (hegemony) at a stroke – seizing that power at the high point of its *mise en scène*, 'the better to wring its neck', as Rimbaud (who accomplishes the equivalent of this terrorist act in the field of poetry) would have said. At a single stroke, all the signs are reversed (see also *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion*,¹³ *The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner*,¹⁴ 'Bartleby', Gilmore, etc.), not through some decision or calculation, nor even by objective chance, like the tennis ball in Woody Allen's *Match Point*,¹⁵ hovering in unstable equilibrium on the top of the net: if it falls this side, you win, the other side, you lose everything.

We might say in the same way that Zidane could have delivered his head butt or not, and there would have been valid reasons in either case. Even where there is 'chance', the event

obeys the principle of Sufficient Reason . . . But it isn't Zidane's free will that's at issue here: though he may well have had the possibility of acting or not, the event, for its part, wasn't free not to occur. Some day or another, Zidane or no Zidane, globalization (global power) would have found itself—finds itself right now—confronted with its success, with its extremeness, and hence faced with this automatic convulsion that has no valid reason to occur.

We may view the scenario in the following way: up to now (and this relates to the World Cup as much as to the rise of some geopolitical strategy), everything is moving in a positive direction, matters seem settled and suddenly, through some tiny detail, a metaphysical scandal erupts—something that no longer plays the game, that no longer conforms to the principle of Sufficient Reason.

Among a thousand others, this particular event obeys what Musil would call the 'Principle of Insufficient Reason' (9/11 obeys this too): 'You know, of course, what the principle of Sufficient Reason is. Only, people make an exception where they themselves are concerned. In real life, by which I mean our personal and also our public-historical life, what happens is always what has no good reason to happen.'¹⁶

In this sense, this untimely, isolated, episodic event is a remarkable episode in the struggle against the total identification of the world—an exceptional moment of simplicity in an exceptional context of the triumph of consensus—an act 'from outer space', so to speak (as with 11 September, we may say that everyone was secretly waiting for a sign of this kind, but signs on this global scale are very rare).

Exceptional in the field of Sufficient Reason, but implacably necessary and logical in the

field of Insufficient Reason—insofar as they need neither an actor nor subjective motivation to take place: they merely express the fact that a power (any power whatever) bears in its innermost core its potentiality for annihilation, for self-annihilation, which it cannot but accomplish if it is forced, in all logic, to go as far as its possibilities allow.

This is why such an event is fated to happen, and why there is no need for any 'objective', sufficient reason. It is because the hidden sign of this power turns around naturally against itself; it is this power that does all the work; it is, in a sense, self-sufficient, both self-propheying and self-destructive.

What distinguishes this kind of event from historical events is that it arises neither out of revolt, nor a particular relation of forces, nor the 'work of the negative'. If, at a stroke, Zidane thwarts the global power

embodied in football—if he defies it without even thinking about it—he does so not out of some sentiment of revolt or from an opposition to anything whatever. Everything that comes from that kind of revolutionary, critical thinking—that dialectical form of overcoming contradictions—was long ago voided of its substance.

That kind of thing is done and dusted now, but, when it comes to this same power grappling with *itself*, matters are not settled at all. And it is by an equally diabolical irony that this strategy of co-optation creates the very conditions for its own overthrow. Since it has kidnapped all the solutions and set itself up as the final solution, no other alternative remains than its collapse, its overthrow, at the end of a process in which there is now no adversary, except the void and the death it bears within itself from the beginning, though it seeks des-

perately through the total enframing of the world to blot these out.

The form of the new antagonism entails the reawakening of the death at the heart of power (the way Warhol wanted to get to the nothingness at the heart of the image), and this can be done only through events that are more subtle than frontal insurrection or the defence of human rights—by parodic events, by all the symbolic forms of deterrence and dissuasion—and hence by the various forms of terror. In this sense, Zidane's was a terrorist act.

THE BASIC RULE, which, though it comes from the depths of our anthropology, still applies even in our present world, is the rule of gift and counter-gift.

If the natural world is given to us, then we must be able to respond to that. If we cannot, then we have to eliminate the natural world. It is

an undertaking of just this kind that the human race has embarked upon, launching itself, particularly in modern times, into ever-increasing abstraction, going so far as to create a hegemonic structure that liberates us totally from the natural order. By this global performance, this technical scheming, this substitution of a controllable universe made by our own hand, we are probably trying to ward off the anxiety produced by everything that has escaped us since the beginning, by what has been given to us without our having anything to give back.

We thought we had found a way out by wiping the natural world from the map. But, on the one hand, this does not settle the symbolic issues at all: the transformation of the world is a technical operation, not a symbolic one. And on the other hand, it is no response. We are just contenting ourselves with liquidating what we cannot respond to.

Now, this technical solution has, in its excessiveness, ended up producing a world from which human beings are excluded (which is normal, since they are themselves natural beings) and created a new situation of basic anxiety: anxiety at dealing with a world that is totally beyond our grasp.

It remains for us to understand what induces the human species to throw itself into such a performance. But there is nothing . . . unless we suppose that *this is our real response* and that this substitution mania is our form of counter-gift, our challenge.

If this is the case, our entire technical universe, even in its most excessive elements, would then assume a high symbolic value as a response to the original gift (the original crime) that is the existence of the world without us, without our having been consulted. In which case, according to this new hypothesis, there would no longer be any reason to submit this whole way the system has developed to the tender mercies of critical

thought and negativity. Matters would be settled here too—'. . . Now fully realized in electronic form, in the zero-oneness of the world, the digital imperative that defined every breath of the planet's living billions. Here was the heave of the biosphere . . .', as Don De Lillo writes in *Cosmopolis*.¹⁷ That being the case, there would no longer be any need to dream of a critical or symbolic alternative. It would just be a matter of going on with the destruction, since this is our challenge and the source of our pride: that we have smashed the fundamental symbolic rule and have not just conceived, but brought into being—to the very worst degree (but what is the worst in this case?)—a truly inhuman science-fiction universe.

We may, moreover, extend the analysis of this all-encompassing machination to the whole field of simulation. We may take the view that the precession of models and images, the stragem that erases the boundaries between the true

and the false, is itself a form of offensive response to the actual world, the real world, and that all this is done to escape actuality and reality, to escape the unbearable pretension of the 'natural' world that preceded us and seeks to force us to recognize that precedence.

Everything would, in fact, come down to this: *we want to be the original*, and to be so at any cost. Even if it means destroying the genuine article. In this way, we are rounding off reality with a demolition project that is assuming insane proportions.

Today, unfortunately, the undertaking has succeeded so well and progress has made such strides that everything is potentially available to us, and we find ourselves in the same impasse as at the beginning, facing a reality as obvious and irresistible as if it had fallen from the sky! And we still do not know how to respond. Nor to whom we are answerable. We can no longer set anything 'against' this technological world (this

hegemonic universe). We can no longer set anything 'against' anything, nor even imagine what the extreme limits of this evolution might be. And those who still have a glimmer of nostalgia in them are asking why the world is so vulnerable to such a project of 'globalization' and why the human being is so vulnerable to this project of systematically eliminating the human.

There remains, also, the nostalgia cultivated by all heresies over the course of history the dream, running parallel to the course of the real world, of the absolute event which would open on to a thousand years of happiness. The heightened expectation of the single event that would, at a stroke, unmask the enormous conspiracy in which we are immersed. This expectation is still at the heart of the collective imagination. The Apocalypse is present, in homocopic doses, in each of us.

September 2006

Translator's Notes

- 1 This text, published by Éditions de l'Herne in 2008, was originally written as an opening address to the Fourteenth International Conference of the Academy of Latinity, held at Quito, Ecuador, on 21 September 2006.
- 2 'Nous l'avons rêvé. IBM l'a fait!' was a slogan in an IBM advertising campaign in Francophone countries.
- 3 'World processing' in English in the original.
- 4 Robert Musil, *The Man Without Qualities, Volume 1: A Sort of Introduction and the Like of It Now Happens* (London: Pan/Picador, 1979), pp. 174–5.
- 5 Don De Lillo, *Cosmopolis* (New York: Scribner, 2003), p. 24, 77, 80 and 90.
- 6 The 'Marie L.' affair' concerned a young woman who falsely claimed to have been the victim of a racist attack on Line D of the Paris rapid transit system (RER).
- 7 In works such as *Après l'Histoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 2007), Philippe Muray refers to the current age as the 'hypertestive era'.
- 8 This refers to the French referendum of 29 May 2005 on the ratification of the European Constitution.
- 9 The reference is to Herman Melville's novel *Bartleby the Scrivener: A Story of Wall Street* (1853).
- 10 Double murderer Gary Gilmore was executed at Utah State Prison on 17 January 1977 after refusing to appeal against his sentence. See Norman Mailer, *The Executioner's Song* (New York: Little, Brown and Co., 1979).
- 11 *The Student of Prague* (1913) is a German silent film, directed by Stellan Rye and Paul Wegener. Based partly on a poem by Alfred de Musset and partly on Edgar Allan Poe's story 'William Wilson', it was remade in 1926, 1935 and 2004.
- 12 The French here is 'la constellation du secret'. Baudrillard is quoting Heidegger in the standard French translation by André Préau, which reads 'la constellation, le mouvement stellaire du secret' ('La question de la technique', *Essais et conférences*, Paris: Gallimard, p. 45). William Lovitt renders this as 'the constellation, the stellar course of the mystery'.

(*The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, New York: Harper & Row, 1977, p. 33).

13 Yukio Mishima, *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1959).

14 Alan Sillitoe, *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* (London: W. H. Allen, 1959).

15 A film released in 2005.

16 Musil, *The Man without Qualities*, VOL. 1, p. 155 (translation modified).

17 De Lillo, *Cosmopolis*, p. 24.